

Using City Directories in Family History Research

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Information that may be included in a city directory:

- Households: Name, occupation/employer, address
- Business listings and advertisements (Many people owned “small businesses”.)
- Government information (mayor, city council, courts)
- Community Information (societies, churches, newspapers)
- Street directory (literally a listing of street names)
- Women: wife, widow, business owner (dressmaker, milliner, etc.)
- Changes: move, death, divorce

Where to look for city directories:

- Fold3 ← largest, most comprehensive collection, easiest to navigate. **Available free in FHC.**
- Ancestry.com
- MyHeritage ← International: Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Israel
- Google Books
 - Full view
 - “Snippet” view – “Find in a library”
- DistantCousin.com
- FamilySearch ← German (unindexed)
- Local public library: local history section, room and/or webpage

Ways to use city directories:

- “Navigate” (versus “search”) if you can’t find someone. (Entries are usually alphabetical.)
- Find your ancestor every year over time. Note changes in address, occupation, etc.
- Locate adult children (listed separately, but with the same address).
- Note when your ancestor is first listed, then no longer listed, to help pinpoint a move or death.
- Find a photographer/studio address to help narrow the date range on historic photos.
- Check all possible spellings. Names may be (mis)spelled a variety of ways over time.

Williamsburg Family History Center

2017 Newman Road, Williamsburg, Virginia

757.220.0266 during center hours

757.903.5706 when the center is closed



Fold3.com → Non-military Records → Browse All Non-military Records Titles → City Directories

Robert Blum/Bloom/Blome, peddler: NYC 1856; Detroit, 1861, 1865, 1866